DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 790 CE 065 782

AUTHOR Vandegrift, Judith A.; Danzig, Arnold
TITLE School-to-Work Transition: Tensions between Policy and Workplace Opportunities in Rural Arizona.
PUB DATE 5 Nov 93
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Arizona Educational Research Organization (Tucson, AZ, November 5, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Policy; *Education Work Relationship; *Employment Opportunities; High Schools; Job Placement; Policy Formation; Public Policy; *Relevance (Education); Rural Areas; *Rural Education; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Arizona

ABSTRACT

Two major assumptions underlying the school-to-work transition movement are that public high schools have failed to provide adequate preparation for the school-to-work transition and that work experiences exist into which states can "plug" young workers for pay. These assumptions were analyzed from the standpoint of their applicability to and implications for rural Arizona. The analysis was based on a literature review and interviews with four people involved in the development of Arizona's transition policy. The analysis revealed that, although certain measures of school accountability (dropout rates and educational attainment) indicate that Arizona's rural schools may have failed to prepare students for work, a good deal of the problem stems from the nature of the rural workplace itself. The analysis further established that rural Arizona generally lacks jobs into which high school students can be placed for pay and that those jobs that are available for rural youths are not the kinds of "work-based experiences" encouraged by the School-to-Work Opportunities Program. It was recommended that policymakers responsible for shaping school-to-work transition programs shift their focus to making such programs developmentally appropriate and, in the case of rural programs, focus on: (1) how best to prepare youths who leave to compete successfully elsewhere; and (2) how to help youths who stay in rural areas achieve success. (Contains 17 references.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 367 790

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION:

TENSIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL ARIZONA

by

Judith A. Vandegrift, Ph.D.
Morrison Institute for Public Policy
Arizona State University

and

Arnold Danzig, Ph.D.
Educational Leadership
Arizona State University West

A paper presented at the

Arizona Educational Research Organization
1993 Fall Conference
Tucson, Arizona

November 5, 1993

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A Danzig

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 065 782

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION: TENSIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL ARIZONA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Judith A. Vandegrift, Ph.D., Morrison Institute for Public Policy/ASU
Arnold Danzig, Ph.D., Arizona State University West

One of the "hot topics" being debated by the 103rd Congress is the proposed School-to-Work Opportunities Program. If passed, this legislation would provide more than $800 million over the next three years for states to plan and implement statewide school-to-work transition *systems* for better linking young workers with employers. Anticipating passage of this legislation, Arizona policymakers are in the process of writing a proposal that, if approved, would bring into the state $2-3 million in new federal monies for school-to-work programs.

This paper examines salient assumptions underlying the school-to-work transition movement and implications for state policy, specifically as it pertains to rural Arizona. In preparing the analysis, the authors draw upon previous research as well as the insights of a select group of Arizonans actively involved in the state's emerging policy regarding school-to-work transition. Interviews were audio-taped by permission in September and October, 1993. Comments from interview transcripts are used to illustrate some of the critical issues that face the state as it positions itself to create a school-to-work transition system.

The authors draw the following conclusions based upon their preliminary exploration of issues related to the school-to-work movement. First, there is a widely held belief and much documented phenomena that students are ill-prepared to participate in the world of work. This holds true for some proportion of young workers. An alternative hypothesis is that young workers may, in fact, possess required skills but be perceived as ill-equipped by employers who fail to recognize behaviors characteristic of a natural stage in adolescent development. Both explanations for young workers' performance should be taken into consideration in planning programs and revising curricula. Moreover, understanding that the nature of the workplace may contribute to employee "failure" serves to focus attention on reforming not only schools, but work sites as well.

Second, school-to-work opportunities in rural areas are limited in both number and quality. These issues can be dealt with in two ways. In the short term, transition programs can and should help students explicitly understand the nature of the workplace and teach them skills that will help adapt in *any* environment -- both low skill and high performance workplaces -- whether they remain in their community or migrate to urban areas. In the long term, the number and quality of work opportunities in rural areas will depend, at least in part, on the adoption of state and local policies that reinforce and nurture economic growth and development.

The authors conclude by recommending that Arizona policies should be created that:

- foster linkages between school reform and economic development;
- emphasize the needs of rural areas and reinforce education and economic development in these areas; and
- reinforce programming that explicitly accounts for the adolescent development of a work identity.

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION: TENSIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL ARIZONA

Judith A. Vandegrift, Ph.D., Morrison Institute for Public Policy/ASU
Arnold Danzig, Ph.D., Arizona State University West

Introduction

One of the "hot topics" being debated by the 103rd Congress is the proposed School-to-Work Opportunities Program. If passed, this legislation would provide more than $800 million over the next three years for states to plan and implement school-to-work transition programs. The intent of such programs is threefold: 1) to strengthen the public high school curriculum to better prepare young people for work; 2) to develop paid, work-based experiences for young people while they are still in school; and 3) to ensure that there is an array of support services for young people which better "connect" schools and workplaces (cf. *Phi Delta Kappa Legislative Newsletter*, September 1993). Anticipating passage of this legislation, Arizona policymakers are in the process of writing a proposal that, if approved, would bring into the state $2-3 million in new federal monies. These federal funds are earmarked to support states in planning statewide school-to-work transition *systems* for better linking young workers with employers. Federal legislation and the state planning effort have important implications for Arizona programs and policy.

The purpose of this paper is to examine two of the most salient assumptions underlying the school-to-work transition movement, specifically as they apply to and affect rural Arizona: 1) Public high schools have failed to adequately prepare young workers to make the transition from school to work; 2) Work experiences exist into which states can

"plug" young workers for pay. We also explore the implications of school-to-work transition for schools and the workplace.

In preparing this analysis, the authors draw upon previous research as well as the insights of a select group of Arizonans actively involved in the state's emerging policy regarding school-to-work transition. They are: Mr. Richard Condit who, at the time of the interview, was Assistant Superintendent of the Arizona Department of Education and State Director of Vocational-Technological Education; Ms. Trish Georgeff, Executive Director of the Arizona Employment and Training Council; Dr. Rob Melnick, Director of the Morrison Institute for Public Policy and formerly Vice President of Hudson Institute, where he created the Center for Education and Employment Policy; and Ms. Jacque Steiner, Executive Director of the Arizona School-to-Work Partnership Program and former legislator in the Arizona State Senate.

Interviews were conducted in September and October of 1993. All interviews were audio-recorded by permission and transcribed. Comments and viewpoints cited from these interviews are used to illustrate some of the critical issues that face the state as it positions itself to create a school-to-work transition system.

Assumption #1: Schools have failed to prepare students for work.

A major argument behind the school-to-work transition movement is that young employees lack appropriate skills and need to be better prepared to enter today's workplace. Behind this argument is a growing body of literature, stemming mostly from the business community, citing entry-level workers' lack of and need for basic skills and preparation (American Management Association, 1993; Murnane, Willet & Levy, 1992). Furthermore, the reasoning goes, it is primarily the school's responsibility to conduct this preparation,

which should include academic and vocational training, including employability skills (e.g., how to get and keep a job) as well as specific occupational skills (Committee for Economic Development, 1985; Ganzglass, 1992).

For the purposes of this paper, we examine this assumption specifically with respect to rural Arizona. The question is: Have Arizona's rural schools failed to prepare students for work? This paper does not presume to provide a definitive answer to this question. It does suggest that the answer is not straightforward. While some evidence implies that schools have failed young people, other research proposes that young people may be misperceived as lacking appropriate skills as a result of the nature of the rural workplace.

To illustrate the first proposition, one could argue that Arizona's rural schools are failing to prepare young workers based on measures of school accountability such as dropout rates and educational attainment. For example, recent research has found that "the [state's] highest dropout rates in 1990 were registered in rural counties" (Kornreich, Sandler & Hall, 1992). Moreover, figures show that "educational attainment is lower than in the rest of the state" and rural trend analyses reveal increasing rates of births to teens and increasing numbers of juvenile offenders (Sandler, Kornreich & Hall, 1993). Such factors could be construed to indict schools for failing at more than preparing youth for work.

However, there are other explanations for what is happening when students make the transition from school to work. This paper draws significantly upon previous research by Danzig (1992) to illustrate one such explanation. In his paper *School-To-Work Transition: Employer Attitudes Toward Employees, Jobs, and the Workplace in Rural Arizona*, Danzig discusses Arizona rural employers' experiences with newly hired employees (i.e., recently left or graduated from high school). He finds that there *is* a gap between what employers desire and expect in terms of young workers' skills and commitment to work, and young

workers' job performance. And, he notes that this mismatch between employer expectations and young workers' performance often is blamed on the home's or school's failure to adequately prepare young workers for work.

Danzig offers a compelling alternative explanation for the gap between employer expectations and worker performance. He suggests that employers, and workplaces, should look to their own unique characteristics to account for unsatisfactory worker performance.

By investigating the quality and rewards of work opportunities for students making the transition from school to work, the study found that entry-level jobs are confined to mostly part-time, low-wage positions such as dishwashers, cashiers, and office assistants. Many employers indicated that they did not offer benefits such as health care, paid vacations, or sick leave as a condition of work. In the few cases where such benefits *were* offered, they were viewed as rewards for hard working employees--presumably long-term and full time. Furthermore, the study found that opportunities for youth to advance within their organizations were limited.

Regarding employers' expectations of new employees, Danzig found that employers devalued occupational skills in favor of dispositional characteristics (e.g., values, interpersonal relations). Self-motivation, collaborative skills, personability, good communication, and work ethic were all named as important attributes of young workers. Skill expectations were minimal as exemplified by the following comment: "Basically, there is really no experience that I really need [one] to have coming in the door."

Danzig's findings provoke the question: Is it reasonable for employers to expect young employees to exhibit desired skills and attitudes in low-skill, low-wage, dead-end jobs? Implicit in the analysis is the answer "No." Therefore, Danzig questions whether it is the school or the employer that is failing the young employee. He raises questions about

whether workplace demands are sufficiently challenging and rewarding to honestly engage workers and elicit the kind of commitment and attitudes that employers desire. In this scenario, the onus of responsibility for the employer-employee mismatch rests on the shoulders of business--not the student, the school, or the home environment.

The point of the preceding discussion is not to attribute "blame" to either schools or to workplaces for the so-called failure of young workers. What *is* important is to understand that how people frame the problem explains not only the questions that are asked, but also the solutions that are sought. For example, those who find young workers ill-prepared seek answers in education reform. On the other hand, those who find work sites ill-suited seek answers in revamping the workplace (e.g., the "Total Quality Management" movement).

With this in mind, the authors asked select Arizonans involved in school-to-work policy *their* view of the issues. How do they frame the problem? Are the solutions found in school reform?

> "We're really talking about school reform....I don't think that on anybody's lips [in Arizona] is any of this issue in terms of meaningful school reform....the school reform issue is moving ahead and [the question is:] 'How do we get some of those people to understand, or even listen, that this needs to be part of that discussion?' And, it hasn't been."
>
> "School-to-work transition will [have] to hitch a ride on the much larger, very formidable thing called workforce skills...the larger issue of workforce preparation as an economic development tool...."
>
> "Clearly the people who are attached to education see [school-to-work] as an education thing. I don't necessarily see it as a labor thing, but I [wouldn't want] to see labor programs excluded. ...The most important outcome of this will be to get people to cut the strings that attach this kind of programming to any one agency and see it...rise above and be an umbrella that stretches over all agencies....because I think if the business community sees school-to-work as totally vested in the Department of Education or the Department of Economic Security, it will have a dim future."

> "What is Arizona's position? At the moment, I think it's uncertain....I don't see how the whole school-to-work transition effort is going to be coordinated with what we're *going to do* in vocational education or *are doing* in vocational education. I do not know what the state vision is, or even the national vision on how those pieces work together."

These comments illustrate that even among those closest to the school-to-work debate, there are a number of viewpoints with implications for how problems and solutions are conceptualized.

Assumption #2: Jobs are available in which to place high school students for pay.

Behind the current School-to-Work Opportunities Program is the idea that students need to be exposed to "work-based learning experiences" for pay. One rationale for this is that new entrants into the workforce need to be exposed to "changes in the way work is conducted" given that the nation has shifted and continues to shift away from manufacturing toward other sectors (cf. Murnane & Levy, 1993). In the literature, the push to upgrade the skills of new entrants into the workforce is linked significantly with the notion that the nation needs to regain economic status and competitiveness in the world community.

The authors do not question the intrinsic value of work-based, hands-on learning as part of a comprehensive school-to-work curriculum. They do, however, challenge the assumption that such experiences are readily available to the majority of students in rural Arizona and, for that matter, rural America. The reality of rural workplace opportunities described in Danzig's research is one that paints a picture of part-time, low-skill, low-wage, dead-end jobs. This portrait is substantiated by trends documented by Sandler, Kornreich and Hall (1993) in their research *Sights Unseen: Children's Issue in Rural Arizona*. These researchers note a "preponderance of low-skilled, low-wage jobs in Arizona's rural counties" coupled with high rates of unemployment and declining per capita income. Moreover, 1990

data indicate that the "employment-to-population ratio" (i.e., the proportion of the population ages 16-64 holding jobs) in most of Arizona's rural counties was "at least one-third lower than the national average" (pp. 5-6). The research literature pertaining to Arizona depicts a worst case scenario in which jobs are unavailable for placing rural high school students for pay. The best case situation is one in which *if* jobs are available, then they are undoubtedly *not* the kind of "work-based experiences" encouraged by the School-to-Work Opportunities Program.

The question then becomes one of whether or not federal or state school-to-work transition initiatives address the realities of rural areas. This question was asked of key Arizonans. Some of their responses follow.

> "Do policymakers think about rural areas? The answer is no for a simple reason. I'll take Arizona as an example. If 85 percent of the population is from urban areas, you think rural areas are going to get any concern? In many cases, they get scraps. In everything."
>
> "I do not see the policies reflecting the special needs of the rural areas....The only thing I can see from the rural side is that I think that some communities, because they are smaller, can pull together and address problems in a very coordinated and effective manner if they have leadership and vision."
>
> "I'm not particularly hopeful about rural Arizona and rural America because I think it's in deep, deep, deep trouble. Having said that, it seems to me that school-to-work transition is an almost non-existent issue in those areas because there are other things. Simply put, the economic development issues are *so* daunting that I don't think they can deal with this kind of stuff. I don't think there's the resources, the wherewithal, the understanding, the talent to deal with this kind of stuff. And, I think that they've got so many more fundamental things that they've *got* to figure out that it's unlikely to see serious school-to-work transition programs happening in those areas."
>
> "I guess I see two thoughts on that....I think school-to-work will be broad enough that it won't require just paid work experience. It will allow for the community service or public sector placement as a work-based learning opportunity to round out the programming. So I think there are opportunities there for rural Arizona to develop some work sites....The other I suppose is a little optimistic and naive. It's kind of a 'Field of Dreams' approach where if you create the skills in the workforce, maybe the jobs will come. I think that has to be an element in our approach....So if the level of the skills of Arizona's workforce is raised incrementally, hopefully the employers will

respond accordingly and we'll be seeing more and more high performance workplaces. Now, that doesn't begin to address the fact that we have a heavy emphasis on tourism and recreation and those tend to be low-end jobs that don't require a high skill level. And, quite frankly I haven't quite yet figured out how you reconcile all this except to sat that the economy as a whole has to have balance and the idea is not to have *just* low end jobs to the exclusion of high end jobs."

These comments indicate that little attention has been paid to rural areas, at least to date. A follow-up question is whether attention *needs* to be redirected on rural areas in order to ensure that rural youth are afforded school-to-work opportunities regardless of what these opportunities might look like. In other words, should a state plan address school-to-work transitions in rural areas? If the following views are representative of policymakers at large, the answer is subject to debate.

On one side, interviewees said that dollars should follow the population.

"You're tempted give an answer like 'No, it's not good policy because it tends to condemn rural areas to their fate.' Or, at the very least, 'If X percent of the state is rural, at least give X percent of the concern.' Is it good public policy [to focus on urban areas]? Ultimately, probably, yeah. And the reason it's good public policy is because *no* school-to-work transition is going to stem the brain-drain. There's very little that's going to stem the brain-drain....so the question is, 'Now, do you throw good money after bad in the rural areas?'....All roads lead to the urban areas, so you've got the make them work....so in some senses, it's not bad public policy though it sounds like a dirty thing to say."

"If you had 90 percent of your people in one program...and 10 percent were in the rest of the programs, where are you going to put your resources? Now, that's just the reality. It's the way it is. And I don't know what you can do about that....If the expectation is some parity with the economic realities of the large urban areas, that's an unrealistic expectation....It's going to have to be proportional. You can't afford to run things out there for five percent of the population base...so there's certain economic realities in what you can do."

On the other side, there is a sense of obligation to serve even the smallest rural population.

"I think that it's unacceptable and immoral to turn our backs on [rural] areas. I don't think that's a choice. I understand the force of numbers, but there are other issues and I don't think anybody in a responsible public policy position should take that path [of focusing exclusively on urban areas]."

This sentiment is echoed by Harvard/MIT researchers Murnane and Levy (1993) who assert "that if education policies are to prepare effectively the labor force of the future, they must address the needs of *all* our youths" (p. 9; emphasis added).

Beyond the Assumptions: Developing Youth versus Developing Workers

The school-to-work transition movement obviously involves schools, workplaces, and building bridges between these two worlds. Central to the arguments underlying school-to-work transitions is the notion of educating and training skilled workers. This paper adopts a premise suggested by Borman (1991) that if school-to-work transition experiences are to result in desired outcomes, then education and training programs need to be developmentally appropriate.

Primarily citing the work of developmental psychologist Erík Erikson (1950), Borman builds the case that adolescence is a phase in which there is an emerging sense of occupational identity among youth. This phase, characterized by a growing sense of independence from authority figures, may be punctuated by "job hopping." In Borman's view, this may be a natural adaptive strategy for youth seeking their "fit" in the world of work. This view stands in contrast to more negative perceptions of youth at work as reflected in the following interview excerpts:

> "I think that we have de facto policies that are coddling kids in this country....I see so many teachers who downgrade expectations....See, one of the things that bugs me to death, and that's part of higher expectations is, with young people, that I'm not buying this crap that you're moving back home and living off of me. 'You're going to be darn well prepared, young person, by age 18 because you need to go out there and contribute.' And that's a societal issue, too. Not only are schools coddling; society is coddling."
>
> "If you look at Gallup-type poll material, what you'll find is that most kids *think* they will do very well in their lifetime financially in employment, but they have no interest in working very hard to get there. Whereas, there was a time when people

understood, if you go back in history, that if you worked hard and went to school, you would succeed. There's more of a quick and dirty mentality...because it's a very material world out there."

In fact, Borman writes:

> "The tendency to see the young as characterized by their weaknesses rather than their by their strengths has been reflected in public policies and in attitudes of employers and others toward young people. The Grant Commission argues that the group that suffers the most negative stereotyping consists of those who do not enroll in higher education programs after high school. Thus although youths value work and wish to become economically successful in terms of middle-class standards, employers' perspective toward this group remains negative. This finding should not be surprising in light of the pervasive bias toward elite knowledge in American society. As a result of this bias, youth who seek employment after leaving high school suffer 'an extended floundering period in the labor market before beginning a real career.' They do so as a result of employers' actions, adults' attitudes and expectations for their behavior, and the viability of local labor conditions, but *not* as a result of the 'inherent characteristics of youth'" (Borman 1991, p. 26 citing the work of the W.T. Grant Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, 1988, p. 26).

Interestingly, one interviewee explicitly recognized the bias against youth to which Borman alludes:

> "I think that 85 to 90 percent of the people still feel that the way you make the transition from school to work is to go through university or college and then go from school to work. And I don't think we're really ready at all in middle America to really respect and understand...going directly into the job market after high school. It's simply not considered the ideal way."

However, when asked how school-to-work transition programs account for perceptions of youth and issues relating to adolescent development, at least one interviewee acknowledged that this has *not* been a focal point for discussion:

> "I appreciate what those issues mean in terms of a school-to-work program. I have not participated in any discussions where those issues have been raised, but I don't think that means that they won't be raised...I think that it's got to be reckoned with. I would sort of anticipate that the people who will bring those issues to the table will certainly be the people who are most closely associated with the classroom and...maybe the people...who take on the task of dealing with youth."

Creating School-to-Work Policy and Programs: Implications for Rural Arizona

Our preliminary investigation reveals certain tensions underlying school-to-work issues in Arizona, particularly with respect to rural Arizona. First, we have documented a lack of consensus on how school-to-work issues are viewed in the state. This has equal implications for policy irrespective of the rural-urban dichotomy. Second, we have identified varying perceptions with respect to the prudence of developing school-to-work opportunities in rural areas. Third, we have focused attention on the need to make school-to-work programs developmentally appropriate -- a topic largely ignored by policymakers. The remainder of this discussion recaps these issues and their implications for policy and programs.

Implications of Adolescent Development for School-to-Work Programs

Understanding adolescent development is of fundamental importance within the framework of school-to-work transition programs -- with respect to high school curriculum and the proposed work-based learning component. Schools, and workplaces, might profit from reconsidering what it is that they do in preparing young people for work.

The challenge for rural areas is how to keep its population from leaving. The brightest students often leave to seek greater educational and employment opportunities that exist in urban areas. Those who stay must cope with limited opportunities. School-to-work transition programs must account for both groups. They must address two equally relevant questions: 1) How do you best prepare young people to leave and compete successfully elsewhere? and 2) How do you best help youth who stay?

A strength of many rural schools is their size and the sense of belonging that is created as a result of a smaller setting. In addition, the sense of community and school-

community connections are often stronger in rural areas (cf. Lomotey & Swanson, 1990). At the same time, rural areas *are* more isolated and frequently lack the cultural and economic diversity found in more populated areas.

Rural schools need to capitalize on their strengths. They need to extend the advantages of localness to a diverse population; they need to assist students build confidence and self-esteem which enables the transition to the next stage of development -- a work identity. If schools are to prepare students for the world of work in the 21st century, Wirth (1993) proposes that they must consider four key human skills -- what Robert Reich refers to as the skills of "symbolic analysis." These are:

> abstraction -- the capacity to order and make meaning of the massive flow of information, to shape raw data into workable patterns ;
>
> system thinking -- the capacity to see the parts in relation to the whole, to see why problems arise;
>
> experimental inquiry -- the capacity to set up procedures to test and evaluate alternative ideas; and
>
> collaboration -- the capacity to engage in active communication and dialogue to get a variety of perspectives and to create consensus when that is necessary (p. 363).

These skills are equally, if not more, important for rural schools, whose students are exposed to less diversity and therefore may be less sophisticated in adapting to the workplace of the future. Moreover, they are important skills for young people in less demanding worksites to make the most out of their experience and, perhaps, to change the nature of their experience to one that is more satisfying.

In summary, school-to-work transition programs must help young workers in rural areas to look at work more critically. This takes not only academic and vocational skills, but the reflective skills needed to learn from experience. In addition to how to do a job, young

workers need an understanding and appreciation of what it is they are expected to get out of doing the work and what they can expect to carry over from one job to the next. They need to think about how work plays a role in their own development from adolescence to adulthood. In the words of one interviewee:

> "I think that the real key issue here is to understand that there *is* something called the transition and it doesn't happen automatically. That's where you get a lot of fallout. That's why a lot of employees are not good employees -- not because they don't have the ability to understand, or the smarts, or even the work ethic....It's not that they *can't* get it -- it's just that no one has ever *told* them that."

School-to-Work Transitions: Connecting Education and Economic Policies

There is a critical conceptual issue of how school-to-work transition is defined. Is it part of school reform? Is part of workforce preparation? Is it part of economic development? Our answer is that it is, and needs to be, all of the above. State policymakers should be explicitly aware of the multiple viewpoints for defining school-to work transition issues. Otherwise, transition policy may be doomed to the fate predicted by one interviewee:

> "I have yet to see what I consider to be even a remotely coherent thought about school-to-work transition....I can tell you that there is no such thing as a policy and it's going to be, at best, 'Follow the Leader' -- the Clinton Administration puts some money into the pot, we'll have a plan, that plan may never take shape....I think that Arizona is in the Dark Ages in this and I think that if there's hope for a policy, it's more likely to come as a reaction to an opportunity to get some money than it is as a thoughtful, proactive [process, where people ask:] 'How do we make this occur? Why is this important? What does it mean?'"

Our contention is that economic development and associated changes in the workplace *and* educational reform that incorporates school-to-work transition are necessary elements of a systemic approach to school-to-work transition. We have discussed that underlying the school-to-work transition movement is an assumption that schools have failed to adequately prepare students for work. A unifying vision for a systemic approach to school-to-work

transition must go beyond this assumption. Equal notice must be paid to changing the nature of the workplace and focusing attention on economic development. In the words of some of our interviewees:

> "I don't think that you can separate the work, anything dealing with education, and economic development or economic issues. I think that's part of the problem. And, still, 99.99999 percent of the people who are in policy making separate those two issues."

> "What's the point of training people for low-end jobs? Low paying, low-end jobs? They really don't require a lot of training. Why should we invest all this effort into the development of a system that is going to either train people for low paying jobs or train them for higher paying jobs that don't exist? ...you can't talk about [school-to-work] without also talking about business and economic development being integral parts....We have to promote the creation of high performance workplaces and the kinds of jobs that fit in with that concept. I don't have a formula of how to do that, but it's clear to me that it all comes into play as we talk about economic development with the skill development of workers."

> "I have *really* believed that if we don't find a way for school-to-work and economic development to link, there *really* isn't any hope for it....What happens with these entry-level employees, high school, you know, the younger student, is a *major* issue for this state. It's a major issue from the standpoint of dependency and costs related to AFDC...[it's] clearly an issue when you look at juvenile delinquency and potential for adult crime....The cost implications are incredible of not resolving the problem of the huge population of young people who don't know where they're going....We've got to find a way to pull people together and get more vision on this point because, why can not a school-to-work transition be one piece -- and a major element -- of a trained workforce? It seems to me that's the foundation of the whole thing."

Framing school-to-work transition issues in terms of both school reform and economic development has important implications for rural areas. You cannot have one without the other and expect transitions to occur successfully. Reforming schools in rural areas *without* focusing equal attention on economic development will only exacerbate the "brain drain" whereby the brightest students leave to seek education and employment in urban areas. On the other hand, establishing high performance workplaces in rural areas without a skilled labor force is imprudent. At the heart of the issue is developing state policy that will help

rural areas out of the Catch-22 in which they are currently trapped, i.e., needing a skilled workforce to foster economic growth and needing businesses and industry in order to foster the education and training of a skilled workforce.

In fact, the state has a strategic plan for economic development (ASPED) that emphasizes high-tech, high-wage, upwardly mobile jobs in a number of "economic clusters" such as optics and information technology. The vision for economic growth and development presented in Arizona's plan stands in sharp contrast to the apparent realities of rural Arizona. Nevertheless, ASPED promises the kinds of jobs promoted by school-to-work advocates who view work-based learning within "the larger issue of workforce preparation as an economic development tool." Indeed, ASPED states that the development of "quality human resources" is an essential "foundation" for economic growth, and explicitly includes a goal to improve school-to-work transitions within this context (*Creating a 21st century economy: Arizona strategic plan for economic development*, 1991; Vandegrift, 1992). State policymakers would be wise to link school reform in relation to school-to-work transition with plans for economic development. As one interviewee noted:

> "I would hope that virtually all the programming that emerges at the local level vis-a-vis school-to-work would reflect the clusters as defined by [Arizona's strategic plan]. If they don't, it's a missed opportunity and wasted effort."

Conclusions

Our preliminary exploration of issues related to the school-to-work movement leads us to the following conclusions.

There is a widely held belief and much documented phenomena that students are ill-prepared to participate in the world of work. This certainly holds true for some proportion of young workers. An alternative hypothesis is that young workers may, in fact, possess

required skills but be perceived as ill-equipped by employers who fail to recognize the natural development of adolescents. Both explanations for young workers' performance should be taken into consideration in planning programs and revising curricula. Moreover, understanding that the nature of the workplace may contribute to employee "failure" serves to focus attention on reforming not only schools, but work sites as well.

School-to-work opportunities in rural areas are limited in both number and quality. These issues can be dealt with in two ways. In the short term, transition programs can and should help students explicitly understand the nature of the workplace and teach them skills that will help adapt in *any* environment -- both low skill and high performance workplaces -- whether they remain in their community or migrate to urban areas. In the long term, the number and quality of work opportunities in rural areas will depend, at least in part, on the adoption of state and local policies that reinforce and nurture economic growth and development.

Arizona is moving forward in creating policies and programs aligned with the new School-to-Work Opportunities Program. Policymakers need to be explicitly aware of how issues are defined. If viewed exclusively as education programs, school-to-work transition initiatives are bound to fail. Policies should be created that foster linkages between school reform and economic development. Policies should be created that emphasize the needs of rural areas and reinforce education and economic development in these areas. Finally, policy should be created to reinforce programming that explicitly accounts for the adolescent development of a work identity. The best of policy and programs will fail if we forget that youth are at the center of the movement.

REFERENCES

American Management Association. (1993). *Basic skills testing and training*. New York: Author.

Bishop, J.H. (1991). *A strategy for achieving excellence in secondary education: The role of state government*. Paper presented at the Council of Chief State School Officers Summer Institute, Okoboji, IA.

Borman, K.M. (1991). *The first 'real' job: A study of young workers.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Committee for Economic Development. (1985). *Investing in our children: Business and the public schools*. New York: Author.

Creating a 21st century economy: Arizona strategic plan for economic development. (1991). Tempe, AZ: Center for Economic Competitiveness, SRI International; Morrison Institute for Public Policy; and Landry & Associates.

Danzig, A. (1992). *School-to-work transition: Employer attitudes toward employees, jobs, and the workplace in rural Arizona*. Paper presented at the Arizona Educational Research Organization 1992 Fall Conference, Phoenix, AZ.

Erikson, E. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.

Ganzglass, E. (Ed.) (1992). *Excellence at work: Policy option papers for the National Governor's Association*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Kornreich, T., Sandler, L. & Hall, D. (1992). *Kids count factbook: Arizona's children 1992*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

Lomotey, K. & Swanson, A. (1990). Restructuring school governance: Learning from the experiences of rural and urban schools. In S. Jacobson & J. Conway (Eds.), *Educational leadership in an age of reform* (pp. 65-82). New York: Longman.

Murnane, R.J., & Levy, F. (1993). Why today's high-school educated males earn less than their fathers did: The problem and an assessment of responses. *Harvard Educational Review, 63(1)*, 1-19.

Murnane, R.J., Willet, J.B., & Levy, F. (1992). *Skills, skill payments, and the mismatch hypothesis*. Paper presented at the Harvard University Labor Economics Workshop, Cambridge, MA.

Phi Delta Kappa Legislative Newsletter, 3(1). (1993, September). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.

Sandler, L., Kornreich, T. & Hall, D. (1993). *Sights unseen: Children's issues in rural Arizona.* Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

Vandegrift, J.A. (1992). *An Arizona initiative for school-to-work transition.* (Position paper.) Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

W.T. Grant Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship. (1988) *The forgotten half: Non-college youth in America.* Washington, D.C.: Author.

Wirth, A.G. (1993, January). Education and work: The choices we face. *Phi Delta Kappan, 74(5)*, pp. 361-366.